Visual Plus Verbal : Improvisational, Collaborative Storytelling for Creativity

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1. Introduction

This paper, presented at the 2015 JALT PanSIG conference, introduces two creative storytelling activities that integrate several improvisational drama (impro) games and techniques, both visual and verbal. The transcripts of videotaped interaction processes, as well as the produced drawings and stories, are presented for analysis.

This study aims to explore the reciprocal contributions between visual and verbal, and interactions between activity structures and learner creativity. It concludes that activities' underlying structures assist the participants' improvisational, collaborative meaning-making in characterization and narrative development.

2. Dramatic Principles for Storytelling

2.1 Characterization

Characters of narratives can be "whatever imagination allows and the medium affords, though human nature is always the point of reference" (Richardson, 2010, p. 130). Their moving bodies and speaking voices cause the viewers to assume that they think, feel, know, believe, and judge (ibid).

Field (2005) distinguishes between characterization and character; the former is "expressed in their taste and how they look to the world, what they wear, [and] the cars they drive" (p. 55); whereas the latter is a by-product of the dramatic choices

and actions they make in particular situations in the story. This suggests that characterization is a necessary process in character creation, but further development of the characters awaits the advance of plots. Field suggests screenplay writers freely imagine their character's appearance, personality, professional or private life, biography, and so forth as preparation for storytelling (ibid).

2.2 Conventional Structures of Story

Structure is, as Field (2005) puts it, "the relationship between the parts and the whole" (p. 20) that is "the base, the foundation, the spine, the skeleton of the story" (p. 21). Narrative has "a fairly regular structure that is largely independent of how they are embedded in surrounding talk" (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 284).

Narrative is a temporal discourse mode in which events and states are related to one another chronologically (Bax, 2011). It is also noteworthy that certain linguistic elements are more heavily used in some modes than others. Narratives are commonly marked with a high frequency of verbs in the past tense, pronouns, and adverbs that refer to time or sequence (ibid).

Discourse modes, unlike genres, do not have a specific social function; instead, they have distinctive principles of discourse progression which use in actual texts in flexible ways across many different genres. For example, joke is a genre that serves the purpose of making people laugh, which often uses a well-defined narrative discourse mode (Bax, 2011, p. 63).

In drama, the sequence of events in a story is referred to as a plot, or storyline. The earliest remaining study on plots, or *mythos*, goes back to Aristotle's *Poetics*. He maintains that it is the most important in stories, and that events or actions need arranging in a probable or necessary sequence with three parts: "a beginning, a middle, and an end" (trans. 2012, p.33). In a perfect plot of tragedy, Aristotle further explains, "reversal of the situation" or "recognition" of a significant fact leads the protagonist to "the change of fortune" (p.13).

Todorov (1971/1977) also explains three dramatic stages based on the idea that static episodes and dynamic episodes alternate in narrative.

> An 'ideal' narrative begins with a stable situation which is disturbed by some power or force. There results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in the opposite direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is similar to the first, but the two are never identical. (p.111)

Field (2005) provides the "three-act structure" as a guiding principle, not a formula, for plot building. Act I is set-up where the character, the dramatic premise, and the situation needs establishing. Act II is confrontation; obstacles should be placed between the protagonist and his/her dramatic needs. Finally, in Act III, resolution, the main character either successfully achieves his/her dramatic goals or fails. Toward the end of Act I and Act II are plot points to place "any incident, episode, or event that hooks into the action and spins it around in another direction" (p. 26). Narrative structures proposed by Aristotle, Todorov, Field, and Johnstone (discussed in 2.3) are compared in Table 1.

Table 1. *Narrative structures for storytelling*

Aristotle	Todorov	Field	Johnstone
beginning	stable situation	act I: set-up	platform
situation reversal or recognition	Disturbance	plot point 1	tilt
middle	Disequilibrium	act II: confrontation	chaos
		plot point 2	reincorporation
End	re-established equilibrium	act III: resolution	

2.3 Impro as Interactional Storytelling

Improvisational drama, more commonly referred to as 'Impro' or 'Improv', is a form of storytelling without a scenario or rehearsal, in which actors simultaneously create and perform a story onstage.

> For example, if two improvisers are onstage and the first one says, "I've

> been getting these horrible headaches," he is probably assuming that he is talking to his doctor or a friend. However, if his partner responds, "I don't care if you are bleeding internally, if you don't get back to work you are fired," it becomes clear that he is talking to his boss, and he works to go with that offer. (Lobman & Lundquist, 2007, p. 3)

To improvise is basically to do something spontaneously, without preparation. Although it is commonly understood as a means to cover up ill-preparedness or to manage a problem with quick wit, what improvisers emphasize is its other aspect. Improvisation also means a release from preoccupation with future plans or social pressures that cause people to be unfocused. Therefore, it is key to be present, with a full commitment with his/her here-and-now environment. In this way, improvisation is "akin to and/or part of the process of invention, creativity, innovation, generating ideas and creating new ways to be and to see" (Holzman, 2009, p. 61).

There are a set of interrelated principles and techniques treasured in Impro. Among them are 'be average,' 'let your partner have a good time,' and 'yes, and.' These principles are "never mastered, but are constantly practiced" (Lobman & Lundquist, 2007, p. 13), just like building and keeping impro muscles. Therefore, improvisers have created a number of games and work based on the principles for training.

2.3.1 Spontaneity— 'Be average'

Every human being is imaginative, even if he/she disagrees. Johnstone (1979) insists that imagination does not require effort, unless it is blocked. He teaches, "Don't choose anything. Trust your mind. Take the first idea it gives you" (1979, p. 82). To be creative, people should just say or do what is natural and apparent to them because they each have a unique view, which is to someone else "what is really obvious, but, up until then, unseen" (Madison, 2005, p. 62). Young children express their ideas spontaneously; however, as they become increasingly socialized, they learn to say or do only what is likely to earn good evaluation by others, which is quite unoriginal. For the purpose of creativity, it is important to dare to 'be average.'

Skillful improvisers often put themselves in a situation where they realize the contradiction of their own ideas and need to justify it. For instance, they may find themselves miming digging in a living-room scene, and then find a justifying idea as

they keep acting in the scene, that they are perhaps hiding a corpse under the floor or retrieving buried treasure (Johnstone, 1999). Spontaneity creates risks, and what makes impro fascinating is that players happily take the risks.

2.3.2 Collaboration— 'Give your partners a good time'

Johnstone (1999) maintains that narrative progression requires an altered relationship between characters as the outcome of interaction. "Good theatre is like tennis in that the spectators look to see how a statement is received, whereas in bad theatre it won't be received" (p. 77). For the effect, actors really listen to each other "as if [their] life depends on it" (Madison, 2005, p. 136). This is opposite to how people tend to listen selectively, quickly assessing the worth of information or waiting for their chance to take a turn (Holzman, 2009; Lobman & Lundquist, 2007). At the heart of improvisation is a shift of attention from oneself to his/her co-players (Madison, 2005).

Great scenes are created when the players provide each other a good time onstage, helping and inspiring one another. According to Bruner (2002), stories are "always told from a particular perspective" (p. 23). In impro, such a perspective is achieved through the collaborative story interpretation-creation. Because all stories have multiple interpretations, the process inevitably involves "identifying the limits of one's own horizons" and "seeing alternative perspectives" (Nicholson, 2005, p. 66), which is an intense, illuminating experience – *a good time*.

2.3.3 Creativity—'Yes, and'

Johnstone developed impro games concentrating on "combining the imagination of two people which would be additive, rather than subtractive" (Johnstone, 1979, p. 27). In impro, any materials presented on the stage are called *offers*: spoken words, sounds, body movements, facial expressions, and many more. 'Yes, and', the most important impro technique, represents acknowledging offers ('yes') and building on them ('and'). Skilled improvisers learn to see more offers and respond to them spontaneously; otherwise, the audience feels that the actors are being dishonest to avoid risk-taking.

Creativity, in the above sense, does not mean "something out of the ordinary, something more ambitions than usual" (Richardson, 2010, p. 84). It is rather a default

for authentic human communication of the dialectic nature. Holzman (2009) considers "speaking and listening as social completive activity (rather than as representational of outer reality or expressive of inner thoughts or feelings)" (p. 93).

2.3.4 Platform, Tilt, and Reincorporation in Impro

Johnstone (1999) teaches what to keep in mind to achieve the three parts of impro storytelling that many performers find difficult: platform, tilt, and reincorporation.

The platform is the beginning part of the story where the stable relationship between the characters is established. Skilled improvisers, being invited into someone's apartment in the scene, say:

> …'Are those portraits of your ancestors?' or 'What are all the chains and whips for?' or 'Shot all these tigers yourself, did you?' This helps to create structure because audiences will expect such arbitrary details to be justified later on" (p. 93)

Tilt involves someone altered by someone else, and a changed power balance between them. For example, after establishing a scene of two strangers feeding birds in the park, they realize they know each other at school, or all the birds flock towards one person. An incidence or realization (two important elements identified by Aristotle) can present a chance for tilt, but tilt is not accomplished until the performer(s) is influenced by it. It often happens that "frightened improvisers keep restoring the balance for fear that something may happen" (ibid, p.89), though the story requires things happen.

The easiest way to find a point for an effective end of the story, Johnstone suggests, is reincorporation of the material that has appeared in an earlier scene.

> Question: Why doesn't the wolf eat Red Riding Hood in the forest?
> Answer: Because if the wolf eats granny first we'll want to know what will happen when Little Riding Hood is 'fed back in'.
> Feeding something back in from earlier in the story adds 'point' and creates structure. (ibid, p. 80)

When earlier materials are recycled, the audience feels that the story has come back to its starting point, and that therefore it is now completed.

2.4 Applied Impro in Education

The terms 'applied drama' and 'applied theater' emerged during the 1990s as "forms of dramatic activity that are specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies" (Nicholson, 2005, p. 3). Theatre education practitioners have broken the boundaries between actors and audiences in their experiments to connect life and art, and developed participatory theater arts (Nicholson, 2011). Then, accordingly, Applied Impro can be seen as an umbrella term for the participatory forms of impro games and scene work, either process-oriented or performance-based, that focus on individual growth in communication, teamwork, creativity, and so on.

Impro offers educators and learners opportunities for a radical rethinking of the nature of human learning. Johnstone (1994) recalls making his first syllabus for actor training by listing school rules and reversing each of them. Having seen creative students looking numb in classes and labeled 'uneducable' by school, he thought of flipping the methods and techniques proven most effective in school for hundreds of years, because his goal was to help people act creatively: "I had been taught to look ahead, so I invented games that would make it difficult to think past the next word. 'Copying' had been called cheating, so I made people imitate each other" (pp. xi-xii).

Sawyer (2011) defined the best teaching as "disciplined improvisation" that can be found on a spectrum between *creativity* emphasized in inquiry-based dialogic teaching, and *structure* in classroom routines and activity structures (p. 2). The traditional "transmission-and-acquisition model" (ibid, p. 5) of teaching is associated with too many unnecessary structures that "could interfere with the creative improvisation associated with expert teaching" (ibid, p. 2).

Impro can be useful in organizing environments where language is learned playfully and creatively. Although language learning in so many classrooms today are all about memorization and repeated practice for the sake of accuracy and fluency, it can be restructured as meaning-making experience to "feel, play, and experiment with words and meaning" (Lobman & Lundquist, 2007, p. 67). Impro, which teach how to support one another take risks "to do what we don't yet know how to do" (ibid, p. 1),

is an ideal environment for exploratory language learning.

3. Activities and Methods

3.1 Activities

This study introduces two sets of activities: *Two Dots* followed by *Hot Seating*, and *Platform–Tilt–Resolution*. Each set combines visual and verbal modes of communication. "Stories can be shown, they can be told, or they can use a combination of showing (*mimesis*) and telling (*diegesis*)" (Richardson, 2010, p. 12).

3.1.1 Two Dots (visual)

Two Dots is an improvisational, collaborative drawing activity. Starting with two dots on a sheet, two to four participants in a group take turns until the time is up, each adding one line at a time to together draw one animal of any sort, either real or imaginary. They are asked not to talk with each other about what their animal may be before or while drawing. When the drawing is done, they name the animal, each taking turns writing one letter of the English alphabet at a time.

The participants of this study were advised to self-regulate their lines in order to maximize group creativity. The facilitator said: "This is one line *(drawing a flower; see Figure 1)*, but if you draw like this, other people cannot add anything; you complete the scene by yourself; then it is not a dialogue, not co-creation. Contrary, this is also one line *(drawing a very short simple line; see Figure 1)*, but this doesn't contribute to the picture. So, don't dominate; don't be submissive. Please consciously try to find the best balance" (video, recorded on April 19, 2015)

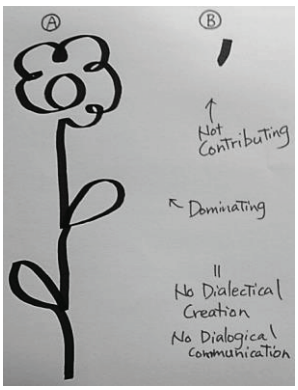

Figure 1. Demonstration

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3.1.2 Hot Seating (verbal)

Hot Seating is a question-answer dialogue used in drama to develop and explore characters. Typically, one participant 'in role' answers questions from others in the group. The questions are sometimes limited to yes-no questions so that the one in the 'hot-seat' does not feel pressured.

In this study, right after *Two Dots*, one group of participants answered questions about their animal from another group. They were given an expert role: "You're the animal's owners. You know everything about it. Now, let me ask you some questions" (from the video recorded on May 15, 2015).

3.1.3 Platform–Tilt–Resolution (visual and verbal alternated)

This study has adapted the three-fold narrative structure (discussed in 2.2) for a storytelling activity and named each element platform, tilt, and resolution (shown in bold letters in Table 1).

In the *Platform–Tilt–Resolution* activity, a drawing–narrating sequence is repeated three times to tell a complete story as a group. To establish a platform, participants first draw a character and the surrounding scenery, without saying to each other what they think they are drawing. They take turns drawing one line at a time (just like *Two Dots*, but they do not start with two dots). After that, they say one sentence at a time in turns to verbally retell the story they have just drawn, starting with "once upon a time."

For a tilt, participants add lines in the same way as in *Two Dots* and draw something in order for a tilting event or incident to happen in their platform picture. Then, they explain what has happened in the story in words. Similarly, they explain how the conflict of the story is resolved first visually, then verbally.

3.2 *Data Collection*

The data for this study were collected in a university class, where 15 students in 4 groups experienced *Two Dots* and *Hot Seating* between two groups, and in a more casual study group meeting, in which two pairs of participants played *Platform–Tilt–Resolution*, in addition to *Two Dots* and *Hot Seating*. All participants are native Japanese speakers.

During the activities, the interactions between participants were video recorded upon their agreement, and later transcribed. Still images captured from the video were manipulated for privacy protection.

Outcomes of all groups, their drawings and stories, were unique and interesting.

However, due to the limited space, this paper includes only three of them, selected mainly for clarity of the recorded speeches and pictures. The types of activities, the number of participants, the length of the transcribed part of videos, and the dates of data collection are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Activitiy types. Participants, time duraiton and dates

activities	participants	time	dates
Two Dots	2 (2 in audience) in-service teachers	127 s.	4/19/2015
Hot Seating	7 (8 in audience) university students	83 s.	5/15/2015
Platform–Tilt–Resolution			
platform	2 (2 in audience) in-service teachers and a university student	74 s.	4/19/2015
tilt		112 s.	
resolution		83 s.	

The participants of this study were university students and in-service teachers, but the activities may be used with learners at various proficiency levels with appropriate adjustments.

3.3 Analysis

The transcribed discourse units were analyzed to understand the nature of the interactions with particular interest in creativity, rather than linguistic forms or functions. Although this study does not treat natural data, it shares the quality of conversation analysis in that "the emphasis is not upon building structural models but on the close observation of the behaviour of participants in talk" (McCarthy, 1991, p. 1).

In conversation analysis, "or indeed any written or spoken discourse which uses the interacting discourse mode" (Bax, 2011, p. 109), interpretation of data must be solidly grounded in the speakers' actual conducts, and the researchers' preconceptions should be withheld. Therefore, interpretation of an exchange can be proven valid by examining how it was responded by the actual speakers themselves, as Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) terms it "the next-turn proof procedure" (p. 15).

4. Findings

This section presents and analyzes six data sets: one of them shows the process of drawing in *Two Dots*; another illustrates student-student interactions in *Hot Seating* after *Two Dots*; and three data sets delineate student-student interactions in the three stages of the *Platform–Tilt–Resolution* activity. Each set except for the first includes transcripts, still images of the interacting participants, and their drawings.

4.1 Two Dots

Two participants (A and B) drew 'Toty' (see *Figure 2*). Part of the drawing process (from the 9th to 15th lines) is shown in *Figure 3*. All of the original lines are darkened, and the newest one in each cell is bolded and numbered.

Figure 2. Toty

Because the participants did not discuss what to draw with each other before or during the activity, when they drew two dots that turned out to be eyes or added lines one by one, they had no idea that they were drawing this imaginary animal.

After the two dots, every line of Participant A's was replicated alongside by Participant B until the 8th line. Then another pattern emerged after A's 9th line that looks like a large dot. Instead of putting another dot-like line nearby, B drew a curly line that started right next to it. Still, the 9th and 10th lines formed an adjacency pair in which the function of the second line depended on the first, so did the 11th and 12th lines. This pattern disappeared when B drew line 14 and left A's 13th line unanswered. A's 15th line responded to B's 14th, rather than to her previous 13th line.

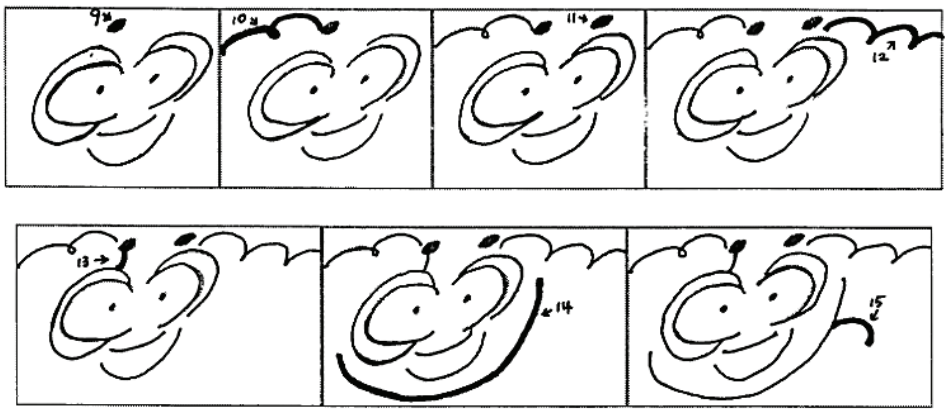

Figure 3. Two Dots drawing in process

Figure 4. Two Dots drawing (left) / *Figure 5.* Hot Seating, student groups (right)

4.2 Hot Seating

After drawing 'Nab' in the preceding *Two Dots* activity (see *Figure 6*), a group of students (S1, S2, and S3) answered questions from another group (S4, S5, S6, and S7), as eight other students and the teacher observed the exchange (see *Figure 7*).

Figure 6. "She's too small. So, we cannot see."

Figure 7. "It tried to, OK, go inside her house."

TRANSCRIPT 1

1 S6: What, what language he speaks?
2 S2: He speaks Spanish
3 S4: Which of the ears does he use?
4 S1: Ears? This one *(pointing at the inner semicircles)* So, actually he wears a space suit [Audience: Oh! Ah!] he created for space patrol animal
5 S5: What is in the center pocket?
6 S2: Secret tools *(moving her right arm as if taking out something)*
7 S1: Weapons. *(the audience laughs)*
8 S6: What can he do by hands?
9 S1: Actually, this is manipulator *(pointing at the left 'manipulator')* It is not hand, it's machine hand *(laughing)*
10 S6: What can he do by this machine?
11 S1: Oh, this manipulator is made by a magnet. *(S6 nodding)* So, he can stick to with *(raising both his hands)* uh, artificial satellites or space shuttle from outside. *(S6 nodding)*

As shown in TRANSCRIPT 1, the interaction started with a simple question-answer adjacency pair (turns 1 and 2), which did not directly reflect any particular feature of the drawing. The quality of questions, however, quickly changed; the other questions were about what appeared to be Nab's two sets of ears (3), the content of the center pocket (5), and the hands (8).

In generating these questions, the questioners picked out and actively interpreted concrete details of the drawing. For example, the four semicircles were not ears until S4 asked "Which of the ears does he use?" (3) and S1 accepted the idea, saying "Ears? This one" (4). Likewise, the other semicircle was made to be a pocket by S5 defining it in his question as such and S2 and S1 accepting it in their answers. The meanings of the drawing was collaboratively created through the verbal exchange.

It may appear that S1 denied S6's idea (9 and 8, respectively); but in fact, without accepting the idea that the string-like objects looked like hands, he was not able to redefine them as machine hands.

4.3 Platform–Tilt–Resolution 1 (platform)

Two participants (A and B) drew a Platform upon the request from the facilitator (F; the author): "Please draw scenery with one character of any kind. One line each at a time, and take turns." No word was spoken between A and B before or while drawing. After F stopped their drawing, she said, "Now, please explain the situation of your picture starting with 'Once upon a time', one sentence at a time."

TRANSCRIPT 2

1 B: Once upon a time, there is a little girl living in a house.
2 F: Which one is the girl?
3 B: Girl. (*pointing at the 'girl' in the drawing*)
4 F: OK. (*laughing*)
5 B: She's too small. So, we cannot see.
6 F: OK, all right. (*B laughing*) Please continue.
7 A: She was, she was, uh, she wanted to step outside, step outside of her house. (*indicating 'her house' with both his hands*)
8 B: She loves nature. She often walk along the street, and especially she like a tree nearby.
9 A: But it's, uh, umm… [F: Don't think too much] But it is a night, it's a midnight.
10 F: It's midnight. OK. [B: Yes]
11 B: It's midnight, but we can see a moon, in the midnight, and she loves watching the moon in the midnight.

Since the drawing stage, F had been wondering why neither A nor B draw "one character of any kind" as instructed, until B pointed to a simple semi-circle in a box (see *Figure 8*) and said, "Girl" (turn 3 in TRANSCRIPT 3).

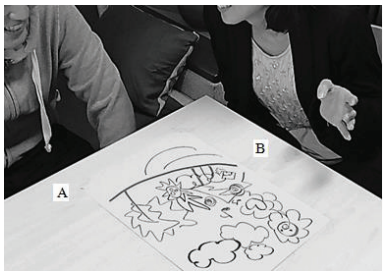

Figure 8. "When it's sunny, the morning, …"

This did not only make F laugh (4) but also B (6), which proved that this idea was unexpected to him, too.

In the 9th turn, being advised not to take a long time thinking, A said, "But it is a night, it's a midnight." Although this idea contradicted with the other ideas present in the drawings (the objects would have been invisible in the dark), F confirmed it anyway. This lead to B's justification: "It's midnight, but we can see a moon" (11).

4.4 Platform–Tilt–Resolution 2 (Tilt)

The participants A and B had not known that their drawing would continue until F said, "Now, something unexpected will happen to this picture, to this story, maybe to the girl. OK? You're going to draw it. Draw something together, one line each at a time, and make something happen." After the drawing, F simply said, "Thank you. So, tell us what happened."

TRANSCRIPT 3

1 B: One night, [*A and B giggling*] [F: One night] [A: One night] huge, strange [A: strange alien] alien appeared.
2 A: Appeared, and it tried to, tried to invade. It tried to, OK, go inside her house. (*moving his hand toward the house*)
3 B: She was so scary. And she tried to ask for help.
4 A: But, uh, she found nobody.
5 F: Ah, OK, wow. So an alien is trying to invade the house, and she's trying to ask for help, but nobody's around. Oh my gosh!

This short exchange involved an incident (an alien attack) and the altered character (she was enjoying the moon, but now she was 'scary', perhaps meaning 'scared'), although the participants did not know the function of tilt in narrative structure explicitly. The temporal adverbial phrase "One night" opened the first sentence (TRANSCRIPT 4). It seems that B was postponing defining the object next to the house (see *Figure 9*), by saying only adjectives ("huge, strange…"). This resulted in co-creation of the sentence between the two participants.

4.5 Platform–Tilt–Resolution 3 (Resolution)

Now that F thought that A and B were familiar with the procedures, her instructions were increasingly brief: "The story continues. Please help her! Go ahead." B said, "Help her, OK" and took the pen. After it was completed, F said, "I'm so excited to hear the conclusion of this story. So, tell us [two audience members and F] what happened?" Then, B giggling and started.

TRANSCRIPT 4

1 B: When it's sunny, the morning [A: the morning] the morning, and the sun came up [A: the morning has come] the morning has come, and the sun made her happy [A: Yes] The sun tried to help

2 A: Yes, tried to help her by its original song. [F: Oh! The sun is sending a song?] Yes. [F: OK, continue]

3 B: And then the song escape, uh, after hearing the song, because the song is so beautiful the alien ran away. [F: Ah!] So, she was scary, but now she [A: was saved] became, yes she was saved. *(A and B laughing and nodding together)*

4 F: OK, so why did the alien run away because of the song?

5 B: The music is too beautiful

6 A: *(nodding)* too beautiful. It hates, it hates the happiness.

7 F: Ah! Interesting. Alien hates happiness. I see

8 B: And love. The sun has lots of love, and alien *(shaking her head)* doesn't like love.

In this last stage of the story, A and B did not only accept all the offers but also gave each other confirmations, mostly by repeating parts of the other's speech, which was what F had done in the previous stages; for example, "the morning," "the morning has come," and "Yes" in turn 1. Furthermore, they completed each other's sentences; for instance, "the morning has come" (1), "was saved" (3), and "And love" (8).

The idea presented in the first three turns, "because the song is so beautiful the alien ran away" (3), was not logical enough; therefore, F questioned: "why did the alien run away because of the song?" (4). A and B successfully justified their original ideas collaboratively in turns 5, 6, and 8, by accepting the other's idea and building on it.

5. Discussion

This paper introduced two sets of activities and showed the processes and outcomes of participant interactions. One of them, *Two Dots* and *Hot Seating* (see 3.1) was concerned with characterization (see 2.1). A character of a story could take any form of creature or object; therefore, his/her/its physical characteristic, habits, backgrounds, and all other properties could be freely imagined and defined. Because there was no correct or incorrect character, everything imagined could become the reality of the character.

The other set of *Platform–Tilt–Resolution* (see 3.1) incorporated the three linearly-arranged units commonly found in the conventional narrative structures (see 2.2). Each stage with drawing and picture description parts presented a specific task: setting up a character and scenery, causing an unexpected incident, and solving the problem.

A close examination of the drawing process in *Two Dots* (see 4.1) identified adjacency pairs of lines in which two lines completed one another. The earliest ones consisted of a leading line and the other following it alongside; this reflected the latter's risk avoidance and failure to inspire the next lines. In contrast, later in the activity, the adjacent lines were interdependently defined as essential parts to the entire picture.

This paper did not discuss the drawing processes in *Platform–Tilt–Resolution* in detail to avoid redundancy; however, sharing the similar structures with *Two Dots*, they yielded similar results. As found in the finished drawings (see 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5), the lines with different degree of assimilation to or deviation from others reflected how the parts and the whole had interacted.

In *Hot Seating* (see 4.2), a verbal characterization activity, a group of participants answered questions about the character they had just drawn. In spite of the assigned expert role, they hardly knew anything about it. This activity design required they make up answers on the spot, as much as the other group improvised questions.

In the picture description parts of *Platform–Tilt–Resolution* (see 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5), too, the tasks required justification of the discrepancies between elements of the

drawings and/or spoken narrative. In the platform unit, for example, what Participant B pointed at as their character was a single short semicircular line, which was hardly a figure of a "Girl." Then, by adding "She's too small. So, we cannot see," she turned the line into the top of the little girl's head and justified the fact that the rest of her body was not seen through the window (see 4.3).

Analysis made it clear the visual and verbal activities mutually informed in the way the drawing provided topics for the talk; and reciprocally, the details in the drawing were defined through the verbal exchanges retrospectively. For instance, out of five semicircular figures in the drawing, one was made a pocket and two others ears at the moment they were called so; while the other two never mentioned throughout the exchange remained unknown.

Table 3. *Activity structures and inspired improvisation, collaboration, and creativity*

Structures	Improvisation, Collaboration	Creativity
Two Dots		
- one line at a time, turn taking - lines not be erased (using pens)	- risk-taking, relatively equal participation - accepting any line and building on it	- unique pictures, as a result of; - meaning negotiation through interpretation/reinterpretation
Hot Seating		
- picture of character - expert role	- selecting topics for Q&A - defining character and its parts	- multiple interpretations - justification
Platform–Tilt–Resolution		
- narrative structure - one line/sentence at a time, turn taking	- accepting any line/statement and add something to it - risk-taking, shared responsibility	- unique story with coherency - justification, for consistency

This shows how meanings are simultaneously created and expressed in words; meanings are not prevised entities to be coded or decoded in human interactions.

Impro activities are interactional environments where participants create, not only convey, meanings spontaneously and collaboratively with relative ease. The structures commonly found across them, therefore, can be utilized, arranged, and/or combined in designing learning activities that inspire creative language use.

In *Two Dots*, for example, the combination of *one-at-a-time* and *take-turns* results in everyone making a small amount of contribution many times; instead of the most eloquent speaker(s) talking the whole time. It also causes the participants to perform not knowing their goal product; consequently, their lines cannot be judged either good or bad. This helps free participants from self-monitoring and explore spontaneous expressions (see Table 3).

Some may think that language classrooms today already use a variety of activities; but actually, most are just different versions of the *get-it-right* game, if not the *get-it-right–and-beat-the-others* game. Behind this fact is the widely-shared assumption that learner activities may well be reduced to replication of prevised meanings for the sake of form acquisition. However, learning does not have to be this way all the time. An addition of the *use-language-to-create-together* games will not hurt.

They say people live stories; but when I first played impro, I realized how I had buried my students and myself in explanations, persuasions, and instructions. If you reflect on you own language use, you may be surprised how you speak with the same people about the same topics using the same phrases most of the time. Let's remind ourselves that the point of learning another language is to learn to step outside of our boundary and expand our world. Then, why not spare just five minutes of our class time to explore the moon, meet Elvis Presley, and find a giant squid in the toilet bowl – with just a little imagination and a set of structures? Now, let a new story of language education begin.

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Visual Plus Verbal:

Improvisational, Collaborative Storytelling for Creativity

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Abstract

This paper, presented at the 2015 JALT PanSIG conference, introduces two creative storytelling activities that integrate several improvisational drama (impro) games and techniques, both visual and verbal. The transcripts of videotaped interaction processes, as well as the produced drawings and stories, are presented for analysis. This study aims to explore the reciprocal contributions between visual and verbal, and interactions between activity structures and learner creativity. It concludes that activities' underlying structures assist the participants' improvisational, collaborative meaning-making in characterization and narrative development.

Keywords: storytelling, ELT methodology, interactional analysis, creativity